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A NEW HISTORY OF FRANCE*

Many and exacting are the demands made upon the historian of to-day. He must be a man of broad learning, free from bias, and thoroughly conversant with his subject—a subject embracing all the ethnographic aspects of civilization. He must possess the art of transforming, assimilating, and interpreting his material; in other words, he must have sound critical judgment, a sense of perspective and of relative proportion. He should be imaginative, able to recreate and vivify the past; and his style must be fluent. These are only the minimum qualifications. If the historian lack any of them, he will almost certainly meet with partial failure. Formerly it was different. In France as elsewhere a certain familiarity with memoirs, a sense of style, and the ability to generalize were held sufficient. Sources, as we understand the term, were neither found accessible nor deemed essential. The historian, who obtained much of his information in the *salons* and other social gatherings, wrote largely from memory. Voltaire even, with all his sagacity and scepticism, is too often a *causeur naïf* after the fashion of Joinville. Coming to the nineteenth century, we find that Lamartine, who could have had access to the archives, not only lacked the necessary time and patience, but was a victim of his imagination. A too vivid imagination and not enough critical judgment were the bad fairies of Michelet, who in other respects is so admirable. Mignet, on the contrary, has been blamed for lack of imaginative power. Thiers possessed all the qualifications of the historian, but did not take sufficient time to obtain the facts. The same failing mars Taine's *Origines de la France Contemporaine*, for haste necessitates too much generalization. Taine has, moreover, been accused by Aulard of seeing French history through reactionary glasses; but the charge of bias might as legitimately be brought against Aulard himself, as also against the late Jaures, for their pronounced socialistic tendencies. It

* *A Short History of France.* By Mary Duclaux. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

is but human that the annalist of one's own country should exhibit political preferences.

In the matter of political prejudice—that pitfall of native French historians since the Revolution—the foreign historian of France may possess an advantage over his French *confrères*. At any rate, impartiality and fairness are conspicuous merits of Mme. Duclaux's *Short History of France*. Mme. Duclaux will be recalled as the able author of *The End of the Middle Ages*, *La Reine de Navarre*, and *Madame de Sévigné*. Like J. F. Bodley, her compatriot, but to an even greater degree, she has studied in a French atmosphere enough to feel thoroughly at home, yet she is free from the pronounced political convictions of the French. She might be called a deciple of Dury, a Dury animated with much of Michelet's coloring. Her sympathetic attitude frequently reminds one of Guizot. Designed particularly for readers of average intelligence, her book is written in an entertaining but stimulating style. None the less, the author reveals acquaintance with Greek and Latin as well as old French sources. Thus her readers get the advantages of scholarship without pedantic dead weight.

Thanks to her broad culture, Mme. Duclaux's ideas are sane and trustworthy, whether she deal with ancient, mediæval, or modern questions. Like every true historian she realizes the close relation between the past and the present. "The past", she declares, "never really dies: we may forget it, ignore it, but it continues to vivify our actions, and deep down in the soul of man we may discover, as in the geological strata of rock, the different phases of being that have formed him. In every Western nation, and nowhere more than in France, the Roman Empire is still a living root of social life." The author's admirable conception of the Renaissance is at once evident. We read: "The reverses and successes of France in Italy were alike ephemeral. What really mattered, what really contributed to the growth of France, was the impression of Italy that the French brought away with them: an immense enlargement of the moral and artistic faculties, the one stimulated by the beauty and science of Italy, the other shaken and awakened by the spectacle of a shocking example." Coming to the Revolution, the touch-

stone of French historians, we find the broad-minded views of a just arbiter. "The Revolution," she writes, "like a fiery plough, cut through France a fertilizing furrow, deep and unspeakably cruel, yet on the whole salutary. It buried out of sight all that hitherto had caught the eye and glittered, while it lifted out of the depths, in a supreme upheaval, fresh beds of virgin soil full of growth and unsuspected vigor of production." The same spirit characterizes the entire book. Mme. Duclaux, though brought up amidst the prejudices of "perfidious Albion", pays sympathetic tribute to the genius and lasting creations of Napoleon. Unusually good are her chapters on The Rise of Feudalism, The First Renaissance, The Hundred Years' War, The Wars of Religion, and The Century of Louis XIV.

The chief fault of the book is its *lacunæ*, a feature common to most "short" histories. Does not the author who would compress into a volume of 340 pages the essential facts of French history undertake the impossible? Thus it is only in the second half of her work that Mme. Duclaux finds space for a continuous narrative. The earlier chapters, limited to selected topics, sometimes end abruptly, as if the conclusion had been omitted. Although no two historians would make the same selection of matter, yet readers of this *Short History of France* will regret the omission of such subjects as foreign relations, the Thirty Years' War, Richelieu's victorious struggle with the nobles, the judicial *parlements*, Jansenism, and relations with the Papacy. Another fault is the infrequency of dates, a liberal use of which would have been welcomed by the general reader.

In a few places, the author has let credulity get the better of her judgment. For instance, she asserts that Chrétien de Troyes owed the inspiration of Lancelot (*La Charrette*) to the Countess of Champagne, *because he says so in the poem*. Again, she accepts seriously the story that Henry IV listened half-an-hour every day to the *Théâtre d'Agriculture* of Olivier de Serres. She likewise believes the myth about the "Grand Dessein" of Henry IV, though this must now be recognized as a pure invention of Sully's. We realize, however, that in each of these instances fiction is more fascinating than truth. And perhaps it is as legitimate; for without a little poetry and romance, few people

would want to read about the appalling suffering of the Middle Ages, the horrors of the Hundred Years' War, and the calamities resulting from the wars that have since drenched the world with blood, even down to the now memorable eleventh of November of 1918.

The World War has revealed not only our ignorance of geography and history, but also the necessity of our keeping better informed regarding the various European peoples and their development. Henceforth, everyone with even a common-school education will be expected to know the essential facts about the intellectual and industrial achievements of the leading countries of Europe. Among these, France surely deserves a place of honor, for no other country can boast a history so fascinating. Indeed, we cannot afford to neglect any phase of French life: neither education nor science, neither literature nor art, neither politics nor religion, neither economics nor colonial matters. Mme. Duclaux, for the past thirty years a lover of French history, has brought within the reach of all a wide field of reliable information about most of these subjects. To students without access to such French historians as Augustin Thierry, Fustel de Coulanges, Taine, Sorel, Émile Ollivier, Frédéric Masson, Lavissee and Aulard, her book should be particularly welcome.

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